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ABSTRACT

This package contains a selection of exercises designed to facilitate learning of problem-solving/communication skills within the area of office supervision. It does not provide the learning material or lesson plans. Section 1 is an overview that explains the scope of the material, learning methods, use of the teaching package, teaching resources, and student assessment, including assessment criteria and performance standards. Section 2 contains all information for the exercises, which are divided into six groups. Each group of exercises is preceded by a statement of the learning outcomes for that group, which are all based on a common theme: (1) preparing and conducting meetings, (2) conducting interviews, (3) negotiating and dealing with conflict, (4) work planning, (5) presenting information, and (6) discussing issues related to people in the workplace in small groups. The first three groups each contain three exercises, the next two contain two exercises, and the final group has one exercise. The information for each exercise consists of the exercise or task; teacher's instructions for administration of the exercise; questions for discussion; time allowed for (each part of) the exercise; model answer; and assessment criteria and performance standards. Section 3 contains the exercises presented separately, with instructions, in a format suitable for reproduction for student use. A self-assessment/peer assessment form is also provided. (YLB)

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Problem-solving skills for office supervisors

Sandy Hathaway

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Problem-solving skills for office supervisors

Sandy Hathaway

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Section 1
Overview

Overview

Introduction

Exercises

The following is a selection of exercises designed to facilitate learning of problem-solving/communication skills. These exercises are related to the application of those skills within the area of office supervision.

The exercises cover a range of tasks including:

- preparing and conducting meetings
- conducting interviews
- negotiating and dealing with conflict
- work planning
- presenting information
- discussing issues related to people in the workplace

The range of these tasks covers:

- customers
- staff
- management (superiors)
- colleagues (other supervisors)

Scope of the material

This package is intended to support the development of competencies in the areas listed above. It does not provide the learning material, or lesson plans. It is assumed that the criteria required to judge performance, e.g. 'effective negotiation skills are demonstrated', are provided by the learning material. The exercises are designed to encourage flexibility in delivery, to suit different groups of students and different teaching modes. They may be adapted and extended as appropriate.

Learning methods

A variety of learning methods has been chosen, including: role play; group discussion; individual preparation of a plan; working in pairs or small groups; observation and feedback; research and presentation; panel discussion. It is important to note that learning should take place via the *process* as well as the *content* of each exercise i.e. the skills required by the learning method reflect to some extent those required of an office supervisor.

Assessment

Each task provides for (a) self-assessment, (b) peer assessment (in pairs or small groups) and (c) formal assessment by the teacher. It is recommended that formative assessment be included as an integral part of all tasks, with plenty of time being allowed for this part of the learning experience. In particular, giving constructive feedback as part of the peer assessment is valuable practice for giving feedback to staff in the workplace. A self-assessment/peer assessment form is included at the end of Section 3.

Use of video recorders

For these exercises, it would be extremely valuable if the teacher can videotape the role plays/discussions conducted, for reviewing by students (either in class or privately—for self-assessment). The teacher might use a 'roving camera' technique, filming each group for approximately one minute at a time.

The degree of self-consciousness of students would have to be considered—both in being filmed and in reviewing the videotapes. However, it is anticipated that most students at the level of trainee office supervisors would have the maturity to benefit from this form of feedback.

How to use this teaching package

Organisation of material

Section 2 contains all information for each exercise i.e.:

- the exercise
- teacher's instructions for administration of the exercise
- questions for discussion
- time allowed for (each part of) the exercise
- model answer
- assessment criteria and performance standards

Each group of exercises is preceded by a statement of the **learning outcomes** for that group—which are all based on a common theme—e.g. meetings; negotiating/conflict management. These learning outcomes are based on the learning outcomes defined by the National Communication Skills Project in their communication skills modules.

Section 3 contains the exercises presented separately, as well as a self-assessment/peer assessment form, for copying and distribution to students. *It is recommended that a self-assessment and (where applicable) a peer assessment (by partner or group) be completed following each exercise.*

Teaching resources

Time allowed

The allocation of time for each part of the exercises is given as a rough guide only. The allocation has been done so that each exercise may be completed within a one hour session. However, the allocations are not generous; the discussion, feedback and assessment components may readily be expanded to suit a one-and-a-half hour session. Alternatively, the individual preparation and planning components may be set as 'homework', so that more than one exercise is completed during the class session.

Questions for discussion

For each exercise, there are suggested questions which address the specific learning outcomes for that exercise. In addition, it is recommended that the following questions are asked *in every class discussion:*

- *what related/similar experiences have students had?*
- *what problems did they encounter?*
- *what are the essential competencies (skills, knowledge) required for this exercise?*
- *in what other situations are these competencies relevant?*

These questions attempt to help students identify the **transferable** nature of the competencies they are practising, and their applicability to other situations. Students should be encouraged to think widely about the relevance of the problem-solving/communication skills in their working and personal life, and to build their confidence in their ability to deal with other situations using these skills.

Resources required

All exercises are self-contained, except those in which research skills are being practised (sections D and F). In these cases the teacher may wish to assist students by suggesting sources of relevant material. Such sources are not provided in this package, to encourage wider reading and maximum use of local resources.

Teaching resources—assessment

Model answer

The teacher may wish to add to or modify the model answer given, depending upon the learning material given to students, or on modifications of the exercise. In general, the model answer is provided only as a source of guidance; in the area of communication/problem-solving it is not usually possible to define all possible 'correct' answers. Alternative answers provided by students should be encouraged and judged on their individual merit.

It is suggested that the model answer (or a modified form) is provided for students (e.g. on an overhead transparency) during the assessment part of the session (or to take home, if self-assessment is to be conducted out of class time), as well as the assessment criteria and performance standards decided upon by the teacher (see below). Except where the teacher is using the exercise for a formal assessment, students should be encouraged to assess their own performance.

Assessment criteria and performance standards

The assessment criteria are intended as a guide as to what evidence is required in determining whether the student has achieved competence. The assessment criteria are related to the model answer and the learning outcomes specified at the beginning of each group of exercises—they may therefore need to be modified in accordance with changes made to the model answer. The assessment criteria and performance standards are presented on a single page with the model answer, in order to facilitate their use as a self-assessment guide for students.

The performance standards reflect the important notion of competence achieved versus competence not yet achieved i.e. the focus is always on the ultimate achievement of competence, and feedback should be directed towards the requirements for rectifying problems in order to achieve competence. In addition, a *credit* standard is included, in order to provide a means for excellent performance to be recognised. Different teachers, or learning institutions, according to their individual philosophies, may choose to omit the *credit* standard, which is not strictly consistent with a competency-based framework. In any case, the achievement of competence, according to standards of performance required in the workplace, should be the primary focus when using these learning exercises.

N.B.: The assessment criteria are written to allow for the achievement of a 'credit' standard. This means that in some instances the achievement of competence does not require meeting *all* of the assessment criteria.

Section 2

Teaching resources

Teaching resources

List of exercises

A Meetings

Exercise A1 Prepare for a board meeting
Exercise A2 Conduct a staff meeting
Exercise A3 Evaluate different group problem-solving strategies

B Interviews

Exercise B1 Prepare for and conduct a selection interview
Exercise B2 Conduct a performance review (including negative feedback)
Exercise B3 Counsel a staff member

C Negotiating/dealing with conflict situations

Exercise C1 Deal with staff conflict situation
Exercise C2 Intervene in client/staff member conflict situation
Exercise C3 Negotiate with other supervisor over resource allocation

D Presenting information

Exercise D1 Present information to group of staff
Exercise D2 Present proposal to management

E Work planning

Exercise E1 Develop a time management system
Exercise E2 Allocate work to staff (roster)

F Discussion of relevant issues

Exercise F1 Discuss issues relevant to people in the workplace

A Meetings
Learning outcomes

- **Organise a structured meeting**
  - state purpose
  - set out and distribute agenda
  - organise venue and physical arrangements
  - conform with organisational procedures
  - select appropriate participants

- **Conduct a structured meeting**
  - comply with appropriate conventions and processes
  - develop strategies to facilitate objectives
  - develop group maintenance strategies

- **Take minutes**
  - record decisions clearly and concisely
  - comply with organisational procedures

A Meetings
Teaching resources

Exercise A1 Prepare for a board meeting

Task

The next board meeting has been arranged on a date one month from today. It will be an all-day meeting, involving all fifteen board members, and will include a sit-down lunch. As administration manager, it is your responsibility to ensure that all arrangements are made for the meeting.

1 *Write yourself a list of all the arrangements that will need to be made, together with an indication of when each step will be carried out, which ones you will arrange yourself, and which ones you will delegate. Include every detail of the preparation, up to the moment the meeting starts.*

2 *Make a note of any additional information you will require in order to complete your preparations.*

Teacher's instructions

This task may be carried out independently, or in small groups (to facilitate the generation of ideas—especially if the students have very limited or varied office experience). The aim is to encourage students to think as widely as possible about the arrangements *in detail*.

Time allowed

15-20 minutes for completing task
20-30 minutes for class discussion
10 minutes for self-assessment

Questions for discussion

- What arrangements need to be made?
- How can you ensure that all arrangements are made?

plus general questions

A Meetings
Teaching resources—assessment

Exercise A1 Prepare for a board meeting

Model answer

Arrangements to be made:
- book room/venue
- book caterer and discuss menu
- make sure all equipment is in room beforehand (OHP, whiteboard, pens, board rubber, VCR)
- arrange furniture suitably
- supply carafe of water and glasses
- organise morning/afternoon refreshments
- type and send out agenda and briefing papers

Other information required:
- location
- items for agenda
- time of start/finish
- budget for lunch
- desired time for lunch
- any special meal requirements
- drinks required—wine/beer/soft drinks etc.
- preferred arrangement of furniture

Assessment criteria

1 List of arrangements includes at least five of above items.
2 Other information required includes at least two of above items.

Performance standard

Credit	1 and 2 above, plus at least two other items
Competency attained	up to one or two omissions from 1 and 2 above (combined)
Competency not yet attained	more than two omissions from 1 and 2 above (combined)

A Meetings
Teaching resources

Exercise A2 Conduct a staff meeting

Task

The senior management of your company have decided to obtain ideas from staff about what type of Christmas party they would like this year. Previous years have included: taking over the showgrounds, a picnic in the grounds of a beautiful country house, a masked ball at a prestigious hotel . . . You have been asked to call a staff meeting for your team, to gather their ideas, and then to report back to management with one suggestion agreed upon by the whole group.

1 *Individually, write down some ideas for yourself on how you will conduct the meeting to:*
- *make sure that everyone contributes*
- *make sure that no-one dominates the discussion*
- *deal with anyone who is aggressive or boastful*
- *deal with anyone who blocks all ideas, or withdraws from the discussion*

2 *Individually or in pairs, develop a checklist of the responsibilities of the supervisor in ensuring that the meeting is as effective as possible i.e. produces the best range of ideas, from all participants.*

3 *In groups of 5-8, plan a role play of the meeting. Decide who will conduct the meeting, and who will demonstrate different forms of unconstructive behaviour e.g.:*
- *withdrawing/blocking*
- *dominating the discussion with own point of view*
- *being aggressive, showing off, criticising others' ideas*

4 *As a group, role play the staff meeting (including 'realistic' discussion). The person conducting the staff meeting should attempt to demonstrate all the behaviours identified in 2 above, while the others should act as observers (as well as participants) and evaluate the 'leader's' performance. Alternatively, the group members can take it in turns to conduct the meeting, for five minutes each.*

5 *Individually, (after the meeting) write a brief summary of the discussion, including:*
- *the ideas generated*
- *the most/least popular ideas*
- *the consensus decision*

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Teacher's instructions

This task may be repeated selecting different discussion topics, to ensure that all students have practice at conducting a meeting from start to finish. This is particularly important if assessment of each student is required. Suggested alternative topics are:

- what arrangement for working hours would staff prefer?
- it is proposed to spend some money on health promotion activities—what type of activities would staff be interested in?
- the offices are to be redecorated to upgrade the image of the organisation—how would staff like their area to be decorated?
- the company logo is to be changed—what is the staff's suggestion for a new logo? (Pick a well-known local company to discuss e.g. bank or major retailer.)

Step 1 may be conducted as a whole class discussion, to facilitate idea generation, especially if the students have limited or varied workplace experience.

Time allowed

10 minutes for individual preparation (step 1)
10 minutes for developing a checklist (step 2)
10-15 minutes for planning and conducting the role play (steps 3 and 4 combined)
10 minutes for group feedback and peer assessment
5 minutes for individual summary (step 5)
10 minutes for class discussion and self-assessment

Questions for discussion

- What are the responsibilities of the leader in ensuring that the meeting is effective?
- What problems (difficult behaviour) might arise?
- How can 'difficult' behaviours be dealt with?
- What were the main difficulties in conducting the meeting?

plus general questions

A Meetings
Teaching resources—assessment

Exercise A2 Conduct a staff meeting

Model answer

Strategies for dealing with 'difficult' behaviour:

- ask each person for their ideas
- use nominal group and brainstorming techniques
- ask for a formal vote on the issue
- impose time limits on discussion
- ignore aggressive behaviour e.g. showing off

Responsibilities of the meeting leader:

- clearly define purpose of the meeting and identify objectives
- establish a positive/relaxed atmosphere for discussion
- encourage participation from all members of the group
- keep attention focused on the task at hand
- summarise discussion and seek consensus
- deal with 'difficult' behaviours without alienating individuals
- ensure that preparations have been made in advance so that meeting runs smoothly

Assessment criteria

1 At least one suggestion for dealing with EACH type of 'difficult' behaviour identified.
2 At least five responsibilities of leader identified.

Performance standard

Credit	1 and 2 above, plus at least two other items
Competency attained	up to one or two omissions from 1 and 2 above (combined)
Competency not yet attained	more than two omissions from 1 and 2 above (combined)

A Meetings
Teaching resources

Exercise A3 Evaluate different group problem-solving strategies

Task

The purpose of this exercise is to compare two different methods for generating ideas within a group discussion: brainstorming and nominal group technique.
The class is divided into two equal groups. Each group elects a leader, a scribe (to record ideas) and two observers.

1 *One group conducts a brainstorming session, and the other a nominal group technique session. Each group should discuss the same topic.*

2 *The observers, in pairs, spend the first half of the time watching their own group discussion and the second half watching the other group.*

3 *The observers report back to their own group on the differences between the two methods. This is extended into a discussion within the group on the effectiveness of the method they used—its advantages and limitations.*

4 *Either the observers report to the whole class on the differences between the two methods, and the advantages and limitations of each or a team of four is organised from each group to debate the question: 'Which is the better method of generating a solution to a problem—brainstorming or nominal group technique?'*

5 *In the two groups, each group prepares a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of each method.*

Teacher's instructions

The topic chosen for this task may be selected from the list given for Exercise A2—or the class may decide upon a topic (e.g. using informal brainstorming technique for generating ideas for topics, and then voting). It is not important that a consensus be reached during the discussions; however, it may be valuable to refer to the number and quality of ideas generated in discussing the advantages of each method.

Assessment for this exercise will necessarily be for all group members together. It may be pointed out to students that this is an important part of 'normal' workplace assessment, where teamwork is assessed (formally or informally) as a whole.

Time allowed

15 minutes for conducting the session (steps 1 and 2)
10 minutes for group discussion (step 3)
20 minutes for class discussion/debate
15 minutes for summary and self-assessment

Questions for discussion

- Which is the most useful method, and why?
- When would you choose to use each method?
- Which is the most difficult session to lead?

plus general questions

A Meetings
Teaching resources—assessment

Exercise A3 Evaluate different group problem-solving strategies

Model answer

Advantages/disadvantages of each method include:

- both methods are democratic
- nominal group technique allows contributions from all members of the group equally
- brainstorming allows members to build on the ideas of others ('many heads are better than one')
- brainstorming is likely to produce more creative solutions and 'lateral thinking'
- dominant individuals can have too much influence on brainstorming
- nominal group technique can inhibit spontaneity and creativity
- nominal group technique requires a highly skilled leader

Assessment criteria

1 At least three advantages and three limitations of own method identified.
2 At least three advantages and/or limitations of other method identified.
3 Group summary includes all main points made in debate/discussion.

Performance standard

Credit	1, 2 and 3 above
Competency attained	one or two omissions from 1 and 2 above (combined)
Competency not yet attained	more than two omissions from 1 and 2 above (combined) **or** 3 omitted

B Interviews
Learning outcomes

- **Plan and conduct interview to achieve specified purpose**
  - plan and prepare for interview
  - use appropriate communication skills
  - follow organisational procedures and policies

B Interviews
Teaching resources

Exercise B1 Prepare for and conduct a selection interview

Task

Your company is proposing to take on a new clerical officer, who will work in your department. The advertisements shown on the next page have been placed in the local newspaper and a number of applications received. Based on the degree of relevant experience, qualifications and presentation of the application, you have narrowed the number of applicants down to eight, whom you plan to interview.

Choose the most suitable of the advertisements.

1 *From the advertisement, prepare a number of questions that you will ask the applicants—including follow-up questions to likely answers. Consider the phrasing of the question that will be most appropriate.*

2 *Make notes for yourself about how you will ensure that the applicant feels comfortable and at ease. Include any preparation or arrangements that you may need to make in advance.*

3 *In pairs, role play the interview. The 'applicant' can make up information, or provide genuine answers based on his/her own work history.*

4 *After the 'interview', the 'applicant' gives the interviewer feedback on his/her interviewing skills.*

5 *Repeat steps 3 and 4 with the roles reversed.*

6 *In class, discuss the exercise.*

Advertisement 1

Computer/data entry operator

XYZ Ltd is a resource finance group based in Adelaide. We manage and control major businesses in gold mining, petroleum, industrial minerals, base metals and diamond mining. Our activities stretch from grass roots exploration and diverse mining operations, to sophisticated investment and treasury activities.

A vacancy exists in the Systems Department for a highly experienced computer/data entry operator.

Reporting to the Accounting System Administrator the main duties will include:

- data entry for a Unix based accounting system
- report printing and filing
- system posting
- various system administration functions
- file maintenance
- work flow scheduling
- system back-up

It is essential that the successful applicant have significant experience in working in a mini-computer or Unix environment. It is expected that this experience will have been gained in a large corporate office. Applicants should possess strong interpersonal skills, display initiative and adapt well to change.

Salary is negotiable depending on skills and experience.

Advertisement 2

Conventions co-ordinator

We are looking for a flexible hard worker with excellent presentation and communication skills to co-ordinate conventions from enquiries to quotes, budgets, programs, maintenance of data bases, preparation of monthly reports and liaison with customers and relevant staff.

This is an exciting position with career potential. Computer skills and previous experience in a similar or related position in the tourism or hospitality industry would be preferred. If you have high drive and energy levels and wish to join a success oriented team then this is the position for you.

Advertisement 3

Administrative Service Officer—Class 2

Applications are invited for the above position which is available for permanent appointment to the Australian Public Service after satisfactory completion of a probationary period.

The successful applicant will provide administrative support to rehabilitation case managers who oversee the provision of rehabilitation programs to people with disabilities. Applicants should have keyboard skills and the ability to work with computer-based information systems and perform a wide range of clerical tasks with minimum supervision.

Teacher's instructions

Steps 1 and 2 may be conducted as a class discussion, instead of independently—especially if the students have very limited or varied office experience.

Steps 3 and 4 may be conducted in groups of three, with the third person acting as an observer and giving feedback.

Students may be invited to select an appropriate advertisement from the local newspaper instead of using one of those supplied.

Students should be encouraged to think about questions that relate to implied areas of importance, as well as those directly stated e.g. Australian citizenship for public service position; interest in mineral exploration for XYZ position; willingness to work non-standard hours for conventions co-ordinator position. This may lead into a discussion about what questions are not acceptable e.g. spouse's occupation, state of health, etc.

Time allowed

10 minutes for preparation (steps 1 and 2 combined)
15 minutes for role play and feedback (steps 3 and 4 combined)
15 minutes for repeat of role play and feedback (step 5)
15 minutes for class discussion (step 6)
5 minutes for self-assessment

Questions for discussion

- What are some examples of 'good' and 'bad' questions?
- In what ways can you put the interviewee at ease?
- How can you ensure that your final selection decision is fair?
- Which advertisement was easier to use in generating questions?
- What questions are you **not** allowed to ask applicants because of equal opportunity policy?

plus general questions

B Interviews
Teaching resources—assessment

Exercise B1 Prepare for and conduct a selection interview

Model answer

Suitable questions should refer to:
- past experience in areas referred to
- evidence of skills specified in advertisement
- specific examples where relevant skills were demonstrated
- interpersonal/communication skills
- likely suitability to position/company
- strengths and weaknesses related to demands of position
- questions the candidate has about the position/company

Questions should be mainly open.

Methods for putting the applicant at ease include:
- ensuring that there are no interruptions
- ensuring that plenty of time is allowed
- starting the conversation with some social conversation
- smiling, making eye contact etc.
- allowing the applicant plenty of time to answer questions

Assessment criteria

1 Questions cover all skills/requirements specified in advertisement.
2 Questions are appropriately phrased to elicit information i.e. mainly open.
3 At least five suggestions are given for putting applicant at ease.
4 Interview is conducted in accordance with notes made and confidently.

Performance standard

Credit	1, 2, 3 and 4 above, plus at least two other suggestions
Competency attained	up to one or two omissions from 2 and 3 above (combined)
Competency not yet attained	more than two omissions from 2 and 3 above (combined) **or** 1 or 4 omitted

B Interviews
Teaching resources

Exercise B2 Conduct a performance review (including negative feedback)

Task

One of your clerical officers, Tony, is due for a three-monthly performance review. Tony is highly in demand in the office: as well as being fast and accurate at producing work, she is able to edit documents, correct mistakes made by the consultants and is very talented at presentation and layout. She is also generally helpful around the office, friendly and popular. However, she tends to be easily distracted when the workload is not high and distracts the other word-processing staff, who are not as quick. Recently, she has also been arriving ten to fifteen minutes late at least two mornings per week, returning late from lunch on Fridays and making more personal phone calls. Although this has not affected her high standard of work, you believe that her behaviour is affecting the other staff (although no-one has said anything to you), because there have been more complaints from the consultants about the standard of their work and there have been a few petty arguments among the staff.

1 *Make a plan of how you will raise these matters with Tony. (You do not expect that she will be argumentative or defensive. She has probably been unaware of the effect of her behaviour.)*

2 *In pairs, role play the interview. The student playing the part of Tony should act co-operatively and listen attentively.*

3 *After the interview, the student playing Tony gives the interviewer feedback on his/her interviewing skills in this situation and success in conveying the message.*

4 *Repeat steps 2 and 3, reversing the roles. This time, Tony may be played as more defensive, argumentative and unco-operative.*

5 *As a class, discuss the interviews.*

Teacher's instructions

The material for this task may be varied e.g. drawn from the students' actual experiences in the workplace, especially if they have had experience with difficult employees, where it is necessary to give negative feedback.

(Tony may of course be played as a male employee instead of a female.)

Steps 2, 3 and 4 may alternatively be performed in groups of three, with the third person acting as an observer.

Time allowed

10 minutes for preparation (step 1)
15 minutes for interview and feedback (steps 2 and 3)
15 minutes for repeat of interview and feedback (step 4)
20 minutes for class discussion (step 5)

Questions for discussion

- How does this interview compare with the selection interview?
- How easy is it to give negative feedback?
- How much difference does Tony's reaction make?

plus general questions

B Interviews
Teaching resources—assessment

Exercise B2 Conduct a performance review (including negative feedback)

Model answer

Must include all information provided. Information must be phrased as *observations*, not inferences, and any conclusions made expressed tentatively.

Assessment criteria

1 Interviewer conveys all relevant information about performance (given in scenario) to Tony.
2 Interviewer makes objective statements—not judgements or inferences.
3 Interviewer allows Tony the opportunity to respond.

Performance standard

Credit	1, 2 and 3 above
Competency attained	one or two omissions from 1 and 2 above (combined)
Competency not yet attained	more than two omissions from 1 and 2 above (combined) **or** 3 omitted

B Interviews
Teaching resources

Exercise B3 Counsel a staff member

Task

One of your administrative assistants, Pat, has called in sick five times in the last month. The standard of his work has also deteriorated over the same period and he seems depressed and uninterested. You have spoken to him a couple of times about mistakes he has made, which has made only a short-lived difference. You are concerned about Pat, because you suspect that he is having difficulties at home and that his absences are stress-related. (You have no direct evidence of this.) He has worked for you for four years and has always been hard-working and dependable in the past. You have to sort the situation out, because his frequent absences put the rest of the department under considerable pressure and productivity and morale are down, so you have decided to discuss the matter with him.

1 *Plan the interview, thinking about what you will say; how you will start the discussion; what questions you will ask to try and draw him out. Decide on what course of action you will take: (a) if he admits that the problem is stress-related, or (b) if he refuses to give any explanation for his frequent absences, or simply maintains that he has been sick each time.*

2 *In pairs, role play the interview. The person playing Pat should decide in advance what reaction Pat will have.*

3 *After the interview, the person playing Pat gives the interviewer feedback on his/her skills in conducting this interview.*

4 *Repeat steps 2 and 3, reversing roles. In this case, a different reaction can be chosen for Pat.*

5 *As a class, discuss the interviews.*

Teacher's instructions

Step 1 may be conducted as a class discussion, instead of independently—especially if the students have very limited or varied office experience. (Pat may, of course, be played as a female character.)

Step 4 may be repeated several times, with Pat demonstrating a different response each time e.g.:

- defensive/angry
- highly upset
- anxious
- calm and controlled

The aim is to encourage students to explore how they feel and react in response to each different behaviour.

Time allowed

10 minutes for preparation (step 1)
15 minutes for interview and feedback (steps 2 and 3)
15 minutes for repeat of interview and feedback (step 4)
15 minutes for class discussion (step 5)
5 minutes for self-assessment

Questions for discussion

- How does this type of interview differ from the previous two?
- Which one would you prefer to conduct, and why?
- How much difference does Pat's reaction make to the discussion?
- How does responding to a work colleague differ from responding to a friend?

plus general questions

B Interviews
Teaching resources—assessment

Exercise B3 Counsel a staff member

Model answer

Plan should refer to:

- allowing plenty of time and ensuring there are no interruptions
- starting the discussion by establishing rapport
- stating purpose of discussion e.g. 'to discuss your recent work performance and frequent leaves of absences'
- need to express personal concern for Pat, but also point out effects on rest of staff e.g. 'I don't want to be hard on you, Pat, because you have always been loyal and a good worker, but things have got to the stage where the other staff are experiencing difficulties because of your frequent absences'
- offering Pat the opportunity to explain reasons—not volunteering own conclusions. Example question: 'Is there something troubling you, Pat, that you feel you can tell me about?'
- alternative solutions e.g. suggesting two weeks' leave, if Pat admits to personal problems; or giving an official verbal warning, if no explanation for absences and reduced productivity is given.

Assessment criteria

1 Plan refers to at least four of the issues listed above.
2 Interview is conducted in accordance with plan, confidently and demonstrating appropriate non-verbal and verbal communication skills.

Performance standard

Credit	1 and 2 above, plus at least two other items
Competency attained	one or two omissions from 1 above
Competency not yet attained	more than two omissions from 1 or 2 omitted

C Negotiating/dealing with conflict
Learning outcomes

- **Negotiate to achieve an agreed outcome**
  - define goals
  - clarify issues
  - establish positive climate for negotiation
  - discuss possible solutions
  - confirm areas of agreement
  - decide on follow-up action

C Negotiating/dealing with conflict Teaching resources

Exercise C1 Deal with staff conflict situation

Task

In your department you have a system where work for word-processing is placed in a tray, with a form attached giving instructions and the date the work is required by. The two word-processors take work from the tray as they need it, giving priority to those items marked 'urgent'. One of the word-processors, Amanda—who is new—often bypasses the urgent work and selects the work from the most senior staff members and/or the most interesting or difficult assignments (in terms of layout). She puts a great deal of time and effort into these assignments, and always produces an excellent finished product, which the staff member is very pleased with, and seldom needs to send back for correcting. However, this practice is putting the other word-processor, Jayne, under considerable pressure, as she has to complete all the urgent work and receives all the complaints when work is not ready on time. This is causing her to make more mistakes, thus creating more delays. She does prefer the more straightforward assignments, and is quicker and more accurate at speed than Amanda; however, she resents the fact that Amanda is giving the impression among the senior staff that she is the 'golden girl'.

1 *Identify the signs and possible causes of conflict that relate to this situation. Consider how the conflict might develop and what might trigger it. Pay attention to individual factors and workplace factors that might contribute.*
2 *Propose some strategies to deal with this conflict situation: (a) before it comes to a head, and (b) if it does erupt into an argument.*

3 *In threes, role play the situation before any actual conflict arises. Two students play the characters described and the third plays the supervisor, who has to negotiate a solution that is accepted by both other parties.*

4 *After the role play, students give feedback to the 'supervisor' on his/her negotiation/conflict management skills.*

5 *Repeat the role play and feedback, swapping roles. This time, role play the situation once it has developed into a conflict.*

6 *As a class, discuss the role plays.*

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Teacher's instructions

The scenario of the role play may be modified to reflect a situation that students have had to deal with at work. It is important that the students can 'relate to' the characters in the role play, in order to generate a realistic conflict situation. Students should be encouraged to consider the situation from the perspective of each person involved.

Time allowed

10 minutes for identifying nature of potential conflict (steps 1 and 2)
15 minutes for role play and feedback (steps 3 and 4)
15 minutes for repeat role play and feedback (step 5)
15 minutes for class discussion (step 6)
5 minutes for self-assessment

Questions for discussion

- What are the signs, potential causes and likely stages of this conflict?
- What are some strategies for dealing with the situation before it 'erupts' into a conflict?
- What are some strategies for dealing with the conflict when it 'erupts'?
- Which is preferable/easier to deal with?

plus general questions

C Negotiating/dealing with conflict
Teaching resources—assessment

Exercise C1 Deal with staff conflict situation

Model answer

Signs of potential conflict include:
- Amanda's practice of not doing her share of urgent work
- complaints made about Jayne's work
- time deadlines for urgent work not being met
- Jayne's resentment at Amanda being seen as the 'golden girl'

Possible causes (triggers) for conflict include:
- more complaints about Jayne's work (the 'straw that broke the camel's back')
- Jayne challenging Amanda about her selection of work

Strategies for preventing conflict from occurring:
- instruct Amanda to do urgent work first
- work out system where work is divided at the beginning of the day, by both word-processors together with urgent work given priority
- supervisor allocates work (less preferred because reduces autonomy)

Strategies for dealing with conflict:
- go to a quiet office to discuss matter in private
- ask each person to state their case and desired outcomes
- negotiate a solution that is agreeable to both parties
- plan any necessary follow up action to ensure that solution is implemented

Assessment criteria

1 At least two signs and two triggers of conflict are identified.
2 At least two strategies for preventing conflict and two strategies for dealing with conflict are proposed.
3 Effective negotiation/conflict management skills are demonstrated.
4 Effective communication skills are demonstrated— including attentive listening, questioning, empathy and confidence.

Performance standard

Credit	1, 2, 3 and 4 above, plus at least two other items
Competency attained	1, 2, 3 and 4 above
Competency not yet attained	any omissions from 1–4 above

C Negotiaing/dealing with conflict Teaching resources

Exercise C2 Intervene in client/staff member conflict situation

Task

A junior staff member is dealing with a client on the phone. The client has received a letter, demanding payment of a bill, and threatening court action if the bill is not paid within seven days. The client claims to have sent payment by cheque over two weeks previously. The staff member cannot find any record of payment on the client's record on the computer.

1 *Write down the signs and possible causes of conflict in this situation. Consider the situation from the point of view of the client and the staff member separately. What is each person concerned about? What does each person want to achieve?*

2 *The client demands to speak to the manager (you). Write a plan of how you will deal with this situation. Anticipate likely responses from the customer and include follow-up action as far as finally sorting out the situation and maintaining a good relationship with the client.*

3 *In pairs, role play the interaction between the client and the supervisor from the point where the supervisor takes the phone from the junior staff member.*

4 *After the role play, discuss in your pairs the success of the interaction. Was the situation resolved to the satisfaction of both parties? What improvements could you suggest?*

5 *Reversing roles, repeat the role play, trying out some of the ideas suggested in step 4.*

6 *As a class, discuss the exercise.*

Teacher's instructions

The content of this exercise may be varied to reflect actual situations experienced by students—especially where they would like to explore better ways of dealing with a situation which they feel they could have handled better. To reflect a phone conversation, students should not directly face each other during the role play.

Time allowed

15 minutes for completing preparation (steps 1 and 2)
15 minutes for role play and discussion (steps 3 and 4)
10 minutes for repeat role play
15 minutes for class discussion and self-assessment

Questions for discussions

- What are the signs and causes of conflict in this situation?
- What strategies were tried for dealing with the conflict?
- How successful were they?

plus general questions

C Negotiating/dealing with conflict
Teaching resources—assessment

Exercise C2 Intervene in client/staff member conflict situation

Model answer

Signs/causes of conflict include:
- discrepancy between client's and staff member's perspective
- staff member might think customer was lying
- customer might think staff member was incompetent or deliberately unco-operative
- threat of court action would increase anxiety/defensiveness
- money is a sensitive issue—causes anxiety
- talking on the phone, rather than face-to-face, can increase frustration

Suggested strategies for dealing with conflict include:
- show empathy e.g. 'I'm sure this must be very frustrating for you—we will sort this matter out as quickly as possible'
- undertake to investigate matter promptly
- apologise for inconvenience and anxiety caused
- ask customer for details of cheque for tracing
- ask customer to send another cheque and cancel original one
- ask for credit card details (as alternative) and cancel cheque
- obtain phone number to ring customer back with information
- (if mistake is your company's) send letter of apology and offer customer value added service or other form of compensation

Assessment criteria

1 Plan includes at least three signs/causes of conflict.
2 Strategies include attention to customer's feelings, action steps and follow up proposals.
3 Appropriate communication skills are demonstrated during role play.

Performance standard

Credit	1, 2 and 3 above, plus additional signs/ strategies
Competency attained	1, 2 and 3 above
Competency not yet attained	any omissions from 1, 2 or 3

C Negotiating/dealing with conflict
Teaching resources

Exercise C3 Negotiate with other supervisor over resource allocation

Task

You work for a suburban branch of a chain of car sales yards. Because of the recession, sales are down, and it has been decided to merge your branch with another one fairly nearby—closing down one site and moving all personnel and cars to the other site. You, as office manager, and the office manager of the other branch, have been asked to negotiate the details of the merger. You have been instructed to cut staff numbers by 15% by a reallocation of jobs to improve efficiency in the new combined office and by cutting down on the number of sales consultants. All staff will be moved to Branch 1, which has the best office facilities and sales location. Senior management will decide ultimately which out of the two branch managers will be the manager of the new branch—unless one of you decides to take a redundancy package.

The staffing and resource details for each branch (before the merger) are given below:

Branch 1		*Branch 2*	
Staff:	*Office manager/book-keeper/accountant (student 1)* *Clerical staff x 3* *Car sales staff x 9* *Receptionist*	*Staff:*	*Office manager (student 2)* *Book-keeper/accountant* *Clerical staff x 6* *Desk-top publishing expert* *Car sales staff x 12* *Receptionist*
Resources:	*training room/meeting room* *technical library*	*Resources:*	*computer data-base system* *magazine produced 'in-house' and sent to all customers*

1 *In pairs, role play the negotiation between the two office managers. Each of you wants to maximise the use of resources for the company (otherwise the combined branch will be scrapped altogether) and protect the jobs of as many of your own staff as possible (especially yourself).*

2 *Afterwards, write down the outcomes according to the agreements reached. In pairs, referring to your written summaries, evaluate the success of your negotiation from each manager's point of view.*

3 *In class, discuss the exercise.*

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Teacher's instructions

It may be valuable to precede the role play with independent preparation time, for each person to consider the desired outcomes from their point of view.

Time allowed

10 minutes for preparation
20-30 minutes for role play and discussion (steps 1 and 2)
20 minutes for class discussion
10 minutes for self/peer-assessment

Questions for discussion

- What outcomes were negotiated?
- How successful was the negotiation?
- What are the problems in merging businesses?
- What do you think are the main costs of mergers?

plus general questions

C Negotiating/dealing with conflict
Teaching resources—assessment

Exercise C3 Negotiate with other supervisor over resource allocation

Model answer

(Only general guidelines can be provided here.)

- five staff members must be made redundant
- obvious candidates are: accountant (Branch 2); one receptionist; two sales consultants and one clerical officer (from Branch 2)
- magazine and computer data-base should be extended to include Branch 1 clients
- library and training/meeting room should be made available to Branch 2 staff

Assessment criteria

1 Negotiation is conducted in accordance with guidelines provided at the beginning of this section
2 Outcomes are considered to be acceptable by both parties
3 Outcomes include points given in list above (or equivalent)

Performance standard

Credit	1 and 2 and 3 above
Competency attained	1 and 2 above
Competency not yet attained	any omissions from 1 and 2 above (combined)

D Presenting information
Learning outcomes

- research relevant material
- analyse information and reach solutions
- produce investigative document—with stated purpose, conclusions and recommendations
- deliver oral presentation based on written document

Presentation skills include:

- information is **understandable, interesting** and **relevant**
- language is kept simple, sentences short
- jargon and difficult concepts are avoided or explained
- explanatory aids are used e.g. diagrams, OHTs, demonstrations
- non-verbal communication is used to make contact with audience —e.g. smile, eye contact—and to show confidence and relaxed manner
- audience is invited to ask questions or make comments
- presentation is entertaining: varied and animated

D Presenting information
Teaching resources

Exercise D1 Present information to a group of staff

Task

You have been asked by your manager to give the staff a brief talk on Occupational Health and Safety—in particular, employees' responsibilities under the Act and the responsibilities of management. You will make this the first of a series in which you also highlight a particular aspect of OH&S and give general guidelines about it e.g. use of fire extinguishers; fire evacuation procedures; manual handling; first aid; ergonomic chairs; noise; VDU dangers; etc.

1 *Prepare a fifteen minute presentation to staff, covering the main points of the Occupational Health and Safety Act that applies in your state and selecting a specific issue to discuss in more detail (but still covering only the main points—you are not meant to be an expert in all areas of OH&S). Choose a topic of particular relevance in your workplace and/or personal interest.*

   This task will require reading the Act and researching the topic you have chosen, as well as planning the delivery of your presentation.

2 *Give your presentation to the class or to a small group—as if the other students were employees within your section.*

3 *After the presentation, ask students to provide you with feedback on your presentation skills. You may wish to prepare a written feedback questionnaire and ask students to fill this in, as well as providing oral feedback.*

Teacher's instructions

Preparation for this task will be carried out independently, over a period of weeks (i.e. it is recommended to assign the task early in the teaching period, and advise students that presentations will be given in later weeks).

To reduce the amount of time required, presentations can be given in small groups (e.g. 6-8).

Time allowed

At least two weeks for preparation (step 1)
20 minutes for presentation and feedback (steps 2 and 3)
20 minutes for second presentation and feedback (or alternative exercise)
20 minutes for class discussion and self-assessment

Questions for discussion

- how relevant is Occupational Health and Safety in the workplace?
- what are the principles of management of OH&S?
- how easy is it to present information to a group of people?
- did all raters agree on standard of performance of presenter?
- what are the reasons for disagreements among raters?
- how does this affect the determination of competence?

plus general questions

D Presenting information
Teaching resources—assessment

Exercise D1 Present information to a group of staff

Model answer

Main responsibilities of the Act are:

a) employers
- ensure safety and health of employees at work
- provide and maintain: a safe working environment; safe systems of work; plant and substances in good condition
- provide adequate facilities for welfare of employees
- provide information, instruction, training and supervision as necessary to ensure safety from injury and risks to health

b) employees
- take reasonable care: to protect own health and safety; to avoid putting others at risk
- use safety equipment provided
- obey instructions related to OH&S (approved) policy
- not endanger self or others by intake of alcohol or drugs

c) health and safety representatives
- elected to represent workers
- can order inspection by Department of Labour

d) health and safety committee
- established if majority of employees request one
- investigate accidents, recommend new practices etc.

N.B. These points are taken from the South Australian *Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Act (1986)*. There may be slight variation from state to state.

Assessment criteria

1 Presentation includes all main points of the Act relating to employer and employee responsibilities.
2 Topic for discussion chosen is appropriate and information given is accurate.
3 Student demonstrates effective presentation skills (see guidelines).

Performance standard

Credit	1, 2 and 3 above
Competency attained	one or two omissions from 1 and 2 above (combined)
Competency not yet attained	more than two omissions from 1 and 2 above (combined) **or** 3 omitted

D Presenting information
Teaching resources

Exercise D2 Present proposal to management

Task

You are personally convinced of the benefits of employee health promotion in improving productivity and morale, reducing sick leave etc. You have arranged a meeting with your senior manager, the human resource manager and the finance manager of your company, to present a proposal to them for an employee health promotion strategy—either for the whole company, or for your division only (as a 'pilot' program, to see how successful it is).

1 *Research the topic of health promotion, so that you will have plenty of facts to support your argument when presenting to management. Include the evidence that such programs can work, the details of the strategy you propose and how much (approximately) it will cost.*

2 *Prepare a ten minute presentation to management. This will have to be high impact in order to convince them within a short space of time.*

3 *In groups of four, role play the presentation.*

4 *After the presentation, the other students in the group give feedback to the presenter on his/her presentation skills and how convincing the argument was.*

5 *In class, discuss the exercise.*

Teacher's instructions

This task may be varied to include other topics e.g. a new computer system, a staff club, an annual sports day. The exercise may be offered as an alternative to exercise D1 (if time is limited).

Time allowed

At least two weeks for preparation
20 minutes for presentation and feedback
20 minutes for second presentation and feedback (or other exercise)
20 minutes for class discussion and self-assessment

Questions for discussion

- How does this sort of presentation differ from the one in the previous exercise?
- Which is more difficult to do (in a real work situation)?
- What is the most important information to include?
- What problems were encountered giving the presentation?

plus general questions

D Presenting information
Teaching resources—assessment

Exercise D2 Present proposal to management

Model answer

Not applicable.

Assessment criteria

1 Presentation is kept within the ten minute time limit.
2 Information provided is accurate, relevant and high impact.
3 Student demonstrates effective presentation skills (see guidelines).

Performance standard

Credit	1, 2 and 3 above
Competency attained	one or two omissions from 1 and 2 above (combined)
Competency not yet attained	more than two omissions from 1 and 2 above (combined) **or** 3 omitted

E Work planning
Learning outcomes

- **Plan and organise work in order to maximise efficiency and effectiveness**

E Work planning
Teaching resources

Exercise E1 Develop a time management system

Task

You are office manager for a medium sized company, in charge of all administration staff (about fifteen) plus all administrative arrangements (including the computer system) for the consultants (about twenty). You consider it very important to be accessible to your staff and the consultants, and therefore you have had an 'open door at all times' policy. You have had a system where your diary sits outside your office, and staff can book appointments in it for any time that is not already taken.

However, you have found, as your workload has increased, that your system is not working. In particular, you are expected to write budgets, prepare proposals and reports and keep up-to-date with relevant information, yet you can never settle down to work on these tasks for a substantial period of time—unless you come in at the weekend. Recently, this has been happening more and more, causing you to get progressively more wound up and causing your family to complain about being neglected. Even though you know that the budgets come up every month at the same time, yet they always seem to 'sneak up on you', so that you work late every night for the preceding week, and come in on Saturday.

When you are working or talking to someone, you are constantly interrupted by phonecalls—usually on trivial matters that could wait—and you never have your diary in front of you to make appointments if you need to.

Your desk is so cluttered that you become easily distracted while working by another task within your field of vision.

Finally, your in-tray is so cluttered with routine memos, advertising leaflets etc. that you often miss urgent memos that get buried within half an hour of arriving.

1 *Design a work management system for yourself that will resolve these issues as far as possible, while still maintaining accessibility to staff and consultants when they really need you.*

2 *Present the main features of your system to a small group (or in pairs) for comment.*

3 *Modify the system, if you consider it appropriate, in accordance with feedback received.*

4 *In class, discuss the exercise.*

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Teacher's instructions

As a prelude to this task, it may be useful to have students record their normal time/work patterns over a period of two weeks to one month, and discuss:

- patterns in time usage
- inefficiencies
- unexpected findings

This task may be carried out independently (e.g. as a homework assignment), or in small groups (to facilitate the generation of ideas—especially if the students have very limited or varied office experience). The aim is to encourage students to think in terms of practical solutions using resources available in the workplace.

Time allowed

30 minutes for completing task (in class)
or unspecified time (homework assignment)
25 minutes for discussion and feedback (step 2: 4-5 systems discussed)
5 minutes for self-assessment

Questions for discussion

- What time management systems have been suggested?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
- Which is the preferred method (class vote)?
- Have students tried designing a time management system before?

plus general questions

E Work planning
Teaching resources—assessment

Exercise E1 Develop a time management system

Model answer

(Suggestions only—there is no single correct solution)

- block off times in diary that are reserved for undisturbed work
- allow interruptions during this time only if urgent
- have a staff member intercept phonecalls and take messages during meetings or 'Do not disturb' periods— unless emergency
- have two in-trays—one for urgent memos only—other for routine information
- keep desk clear except for current work. All other work is filed immediately—or placed in tray for filing by assistant
- plan ahead for predictable assignments—reserve time in diary; prepare others to work on supplying information required etc.
- plan to work late one night per week—so family is prepared—time can then be used for 'treat' e.g. cinema or swimming—if it is not necessary to stay back.

Assessment criteria

1 Time management system covers all aspects of the task.
2 Suggestions are practical and likely to be effective.
3 Presentation of details is clear and comprehensive.

Performance standard

Credit	1, 2 and 3 above
Competency attained	1 and 2 above
Competency not yet attained	any omissions from 1 or 2 above

E Work planning
Teaching resources

Exercise E2 Allocate work to staff (team)

Task

There are five people in your section, whose work organisation you are responsible for. Their roster for the week has to meet the following restrictions:

- *each person has approximately equal time on* ***reception***
- *each person has approximately equal time on* ***customer phone queries***
- *each person has approximately equal time on* ***word processing***
- *each person has to take the mail once*
- *reception has to be staffed from 8.45 am-5 pm every day*
- *the mail goes at 3.30 pm*
- *wherever possible, there must be two people taking phone queries from 9 am to 5.30 pm every day (can be just one for short times e.g. lunchtime or end of the day)*
- *any person not required for phone or reception duties does word processing*
- *one person leaves at 4.30 pm on Monday and Thursday for study (paid time—does not have to make the time up)*
- *one person arrives at 9.30 am every day, because of school children*
- *another person has Friday off*
- *everyone has half an hour for lunch*
- *everyone works 37½ hours per week (including paid study leave)*

1 *Organise a week's roster, taking all the above restrictions into account. Hint: start by taking a blank weekly timetable and marking in columns for every duty that has to be fulfilled. Work in half day segments.*

2 *Write out the roster in a suitable form for pinning up on the staff noticeboard.*

Teacher's instructions

This task may be carried out independently (e.g. as a homework assignment), or in small groups (to facilitate the generation of ideas—especially if the students have very limited or varied office experience). In this case, skills associated with working in groups are also being practised. This may be emphasised if appropriate.

A blank timetable is provided at the end of section 2. This may be used as a resource to help the students in designing the roster.

Time allowed

30 minutes for completing task (in small groups during class)
or unspecified time (homework assignment)
25 minutes for discussion
5 minutes for self-assessment

Questions for discussion

- How easy is it to work out the roster?
- Are the restrictions realistic in today's workforce?
- What example rosters have been designed?

plus general questions

E Work planning
Teaching resources—assessment

Exercise E2 Allocate work to staff (team)

Model answer

Suggested answer at end of section 2

Assessment criteria

1 Roster takes into account all restrictions correctly.
2 Roster is a practical and effective solution.
3 Roster is presented in a neat and legible form.
4 *Useful contribution is made to group discussion.
5 *Interaction with others is courteous, supportive and effective; attentive listening is shown.

** These criteria apply if exercise is carried out in small groups. Assessment of these criteria may be omitted until learning outcomes for Section F have been addressed.*

Performance standard

Credit	all above (relevant) items
Competency attained	1 and 2 above
Competency not yet attained	any omissions from 1 or 2 above

F Discussion of relevant issues in small groups
Learning outcomes

- interaction is supportive, efficient, effective and courteous
- participation in the discussion takes place
- contributions are constructive in terms of the goal
- group decisions are understood

F Discussion of relevant issues in small groups Teaching resources

Exercise F1 Discuss issues relevant to people in the workplace

Task

The following are some issues that are relevant to office supervisors in the contemporary Australian workplace and society: absenteeism; affirmative action; managerial ethics; stress; computers in the workplace.

1 *In small groups, select a topic for discussion (which will be in a later session). Choose from the topics given above, or select an alternative issue. You may like to develop a specific question to debate e.g.:*
   - *How can employee absenteeism be reduced?*
   - *How effective is affirmative action in the workplace?*
   - *What pressures act on employees or managers to act unethically?*
   - *Should stress be a compensable work-related injury?*
   - *Have computers had a positive or a negative impact on the office overall?*

2 *Research the topic in preparation for discussion. Be prepared to contribute a viewpoint, supported by evidence.*

3 *In groups (of 4-6) discuss the topic you have chosen.*

4 *Afterwards, individually, summarise briefly on paper the main points made in answer to the question and state (giving reasons) your own conclusion.*

5 *Reform the group (briefly) to check that all summaries are consistent and elect one spokesperson to report the results of your discussion to the rest of the class.*

Teacher's instructions

Ideally, the selection of topics should be guided so that each group researches and discusses a different topic (for maximum sharing of information).

Time allowed

Preparation time is unspecified.
20-30 minutes for discussion (step 3)
10 minutes for individual summarising (step 4)
15-20 minutes for group summarising and presentation to class (step 5)
10 minutes for class discussion and self-assessment

Questions for discussion

- How important are these issues in the Australian workplace?
- From what sources did you obtain information on the issues
- How can you ensure that everyone contributes to the discussion?

plus general questions

F Discussion of relevant issues in small groups Teaching resources—assessment

Exercise F1 Discuss issues relevant to people in the workplace

Model answer

Not applicable

Assessment criteria

1 Research is conducted and relevant information obtained.
2 At least one idea is contributed to the discussion (more than statement of agreement or disagreement with another idea).
3 All points made in discussion are summarised accurately
4 Conclusion drawn is consistent with information obtained
5 Interaction with others is courteous, supportive and effective; attentive listening is shown

Performance standard

Credit	1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 above
Competency attained	One or two omissions from 3 or 4
Competency not yet attained	1, 2 **and/or** 5 omitted

Work roster

	Monday					Tuesday					Wednesday					Thursday					Friday				
	Rec	Phone		WP		Rec	Phone		WP		Rec	Phone		WP		Rec	Phone		WP		Rec	Phone		WP	
	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	2
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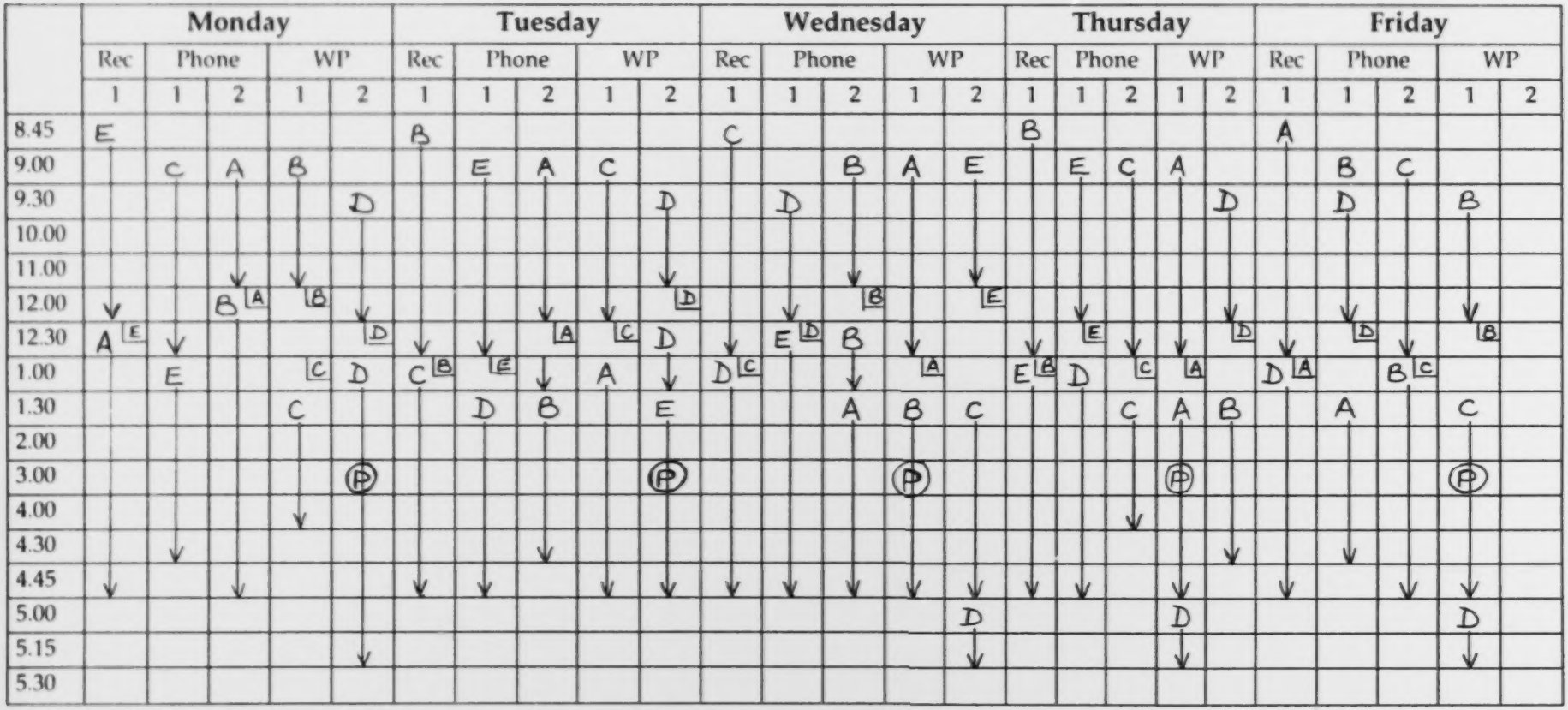
Work roster—model answer



indicates lunch

(P) indicates mail

Rec = reception

WP = word processing

Person C finishes at 4.30pm Mon & Thu

Person D starts at 9.30am

Person E does not work Friday

Section 3

Student exercises

Student exercises

List of exercises

A Meetings

Exercise A1 Prepare for a board meeting
Exercise A2 Conduct a staff meeting
Exercise A3 Evaluate different group problem-solving strategies

B Interviews

Exercise B1 Prepare for and conduct a selection interview
Exercise B2 Conduct a performance review (including negative feedback)
Exercise B3 Counsel a staff member

C Negotiating/dealing with conflict situations

Exercise C1 Deal with staff conflict situation
Exercise C2 Intervene in client/staff member conflict situation
Exercise C3 Negotiate with other supervisor over resource allocation

D Presenting information

Exercise D1 Present information to group of staff
Exercise D2 Present proposal to management

E Work planning

Exercise E1 Develop a time management system
Exercise E2 Allocate work to staff (roster)

F Discussion of relevant issues

Exercise F1 Discuss issues relevant to people in the workplace

A Meetings
Student exercises

Exercise A1 Prepare for a board meeting

Exercise

The next board meeting has been arranged on a date one month from today. It will be an all-day meeting, involving all fifteen board members, and will include a sit-down lunch. As administration manager, it is your responsibility to ensure that all arrangements are made for the meeting.

Instructions

1 Write yourself a list of all the arrangements that will need to be made, together with an indication of when each step will be carried out, which ones you will arrange yourself and which ones you will delegate. Include every detail of the preparation, up to the moment the meeting starts.

2 Make a note of any additional information you will require in order to complete your preparations.

A Meetings
Student exercises

Exercise A2 Conduct a staff meeting

Exercise

The senior management of your company have decided to obtain ideas from staff about what type of Christmas party they would like this year. Previous years have included: taking over the showgrounds, a picnic in the grounds of a beautiful country house, a masked ball at a prestigious hotel . . . You have been asked to call a staff meeting for your team, to gather their ideas, and then to report back to management with one suggestion agreed upon by the whole group.

Instructions

1 Individually, write down some ideas for yourself on how you will conduct the meeting to:
- make sure that everyone contributes
- make sure that no-one dominates the discussion
- deal with anyone who is aggressive or boastful
- deal with anyone who blocks all ideas, or withdraws from the discussion

2 Individually or in pairs, develop a checklist of the responsibilities of the supervisor in ensuring that the meeting is as effective as possible i.e. produces the best range of ideas, from all participants.

3 In groups of 5-8, plan a role play of the meeting. Decide who will conduct the meeting, and who will demonstrate different forms of unconstructive behaviour e.g.:
- withdrawing/blocking
- dominating the discussion with own point of view
- being aggressive, showing off, criticising others' ideas

4 As a group, role play the staff meeting (including 'realistic' discussion). The person conducting the staff meeting should attempt to demonstrate all the behaviours identified in 2 above, while the others should act as observers (as well as participants) and evaluate the 'leader's' performance. Alternatively, the group members can take it in turns to conduct the meeting, for five minutes each.

5 Individually, (after the meeting) write a brief summary of the discussion, including:
- the ideas generated
- the most/least popular ideas
- the consensus decision

A Meetings
Student exercises

Exercise A3 Evaluate different group problem-solving strategies

Exercise

The purpose of this exercise is to compare two different methods for generating ideas within a group discussion: brainstorming and nominal group technique.
The class is divided into two equal groups. Each group elects a leader, a scribe (to record ideas) and two observers.

Instructions

1 One group conducts a brainstorming session, and the other a nominal group technique session. Each group should discuss the same topic.

2 The observers, in pairs, spend the first half of the time watching their own group discussion and the second half watching the other group.

3 The observers report back to their own group on the differences between the two methods. This is extended into a discussion within the group on the effectiveness of the method they used—its advantages and limitations.

4 **Either** the observers report to the whole class on the differences between the two methods, and the advantages and limitations of each **or** a team of four is organised from each group to debate the question: 'Which is the better method of generating a solution to a problem—brainstorming or nominal group technique?'

5 In the two groups, each group prepares a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of each method.

B Interviews
Student exercises

Exercise B1 Prepare for and conduct a selection interview

Exercise

Your company is proposing to take on a new clerical officer, who will work in your department. The advertisements shown on the next page have been placed in the local newspaper and a number of applications received. Based on the degree of relevant experience, qualifications and presentation of the application, you have narrowed the number of applicants down to eight, whom you plan to interview. Choose the most suitable of the advertisements.

Instructions

1 From the advertisement, prepare a number of questions that you will ask the applicants—including follow-up questions to likely answers. Consider the phrasing of the question that will be most appropriate.

2 Make notes for yourself about how you will ensure that the applicant feels comfortable and at ease. Include any preparation or arrangements that you may need to make in advance.

3 In pairs, role play the interview. The 'applicant' can make up information, or provide genuine answers based on his/her own work history.

4 After the 'interview', the 'applicant' gives the interviewer feedback on his/her interviewing skills.

5 Repeat steps 3 and 4 with the roles reversed.

6 In class, discuss the exercise.

Advertisement 1

Computer/data entry operator

XYZ Ltd is a resource finance group based in Adelaide. We manage and control major businesses in gold mining, petroleum, industrial minerals, base metals and diamond mining. Our activities stretch from grass roots exploration and diverse mining operations, to sophisticated investment and treasury activities.

A vacancy exists in the Systems Department for a highly experienced computer/data entry operator.

Reporting to the Accounting System Administrator the main duties will include:

- data entry for a Unix based accounting system
- report printing and filing
- system posting
- various system administration functions
- file maintenance
- work flow scheduling
- system back-up

It is essential that the successful applicant have significant experience in working in a mini-computer or Unix environment. It is expected that this experience will have been gained in a large corporate office. Applicants should possess strong interpersonal skills, display initiative and adapt well to change.

Salary is negotiable depending on skills and experience.

Advertisement 2

Conventions co-ordinator

We are looking for a flexible hard worker with excellent presentation and communication skills to co-ordinate conventions from enquiries to quotes, budgets, programs, maintenance of data bases, preparation of monthly reports and liaison with customers and relevant staff.

This is an exciting position with career potential. Computer skills and previous experience in a similar or related position in the tourism or hospitality industry would be preferred. If you have high drive and energy levels and wish to join a success oriented team then this is the position for you.

Advertisement 3

Administrative Service Officer—Class 2

Applications are invited for the above position which is available for permanent appointment to the Australian Public Service after satisfactory completion of a probationary period.

The successful applicant will provide administrative support to rehabilitation case managers who oversee the provision of rehabilitation programs to people with disabilities. Applicants should have keyboard skills and the ability to work with computer-based information systems and perform a wide range of clerical tasks with minimum supervision.

B Interviews
Student exercises

Exercise B2 Conduct a performance review (including negative feedback)

Exercise

One of your clerical officers, Tony, is due for a three-monthly performance review. Tony is highly in demand in the office: as well as being fast and accurate at producing work, she is able to edit documents, correct mistakes made by the consultants and is very talented at presentation and layout. She is also generally helpful around the office, friendly and popular. However, she tends to be easily distracted when the workload is not high and distracts the other word-processing staff, who are not as quick. Recently, she has also been arriving ten to fifteen minutes late at least two mornings per week, returning late from lunch on Fridays and making more personal phone calls. Although this has not affected her high standard of work, you believe that her behaviour is affecting the other staff (although no-one has said anything to you), because there have been more complaints from the consultants about the standard of their work and there have been a few petty arguments among the staff.

Instructions

1 Make a plan of how you will raise these matters with Tony. (You do not expect that she will be argumentative or defensive. She has probably been unaware of the effect of her behaviour.)

2 In pairs, role play the interview. The student playing the part of Tony should act co-operatively and listen attentively.

3 After the interview, the student playing Tony gives the interviewer feedback on his/her interviewing skills in this situation and success in conveying the message.

4 Repeat steps 2 and 3, reversing the roles. This time, Tony may be played as more defensive, argumentative and unco-operative.

5 As a class, discuss the interviews.

B Interviews
Student exercises

Exercise B3 Counsel a staff member

Exercise

One of your administrative assistants, Pat, has called in sick five times in the last month. The standard of his work has also deteriorated over the same period and he seems depressed and uninterested. You have spoken to him a couple of times about mistakes he has made, which has made only a short-lived difference. You are concerned about Pat, because you suspect that he is having difficulties at home and that his absences are stress-related. (You have no direct evidence of this.) He has worked for you for four years and has always been hard-working and dependable in the past. You have to sort the situation out, because his frequent absences put the rest of the department under considerable pressure and productivity and morale are down, so you have decided to discuss the matter with him.

Instructions

1 Plan the interview, thinking about what you will say; how you will start the discussion; what questions you will ask to try and draw him out. Decide on what course of action you will take: (a) if he admits that the problem is stress-related, or (b) if he refuses to give any explanation for his frequent absences, or simply maintains that he has been sick each time.

2 In pairs, role play the interview. The person playing Pat should decide in advance what reaction Pat will have.

3 After the interview, the person playing Pat gives the interviewer feedback on his/her skills in conducting this interview.

4 Repeat steps 2 and 3, reversing roles. In this case, a different reaction can be chosen for Pat.

5 As a class, discuss the interviews.

C Negotiating/dealing with conflict
Student exercises

Exercise C1 Deal with staff conflict situation

Exercise

In your department you have a system where work for word-processing is placed in a tray, with a form attached giving instructions and the date the work is required by. The two word-processors take work from the tray as they need it, giving priority to those items marked 'urgent'. One of the word-processors, Amanda—who is new—often bypasses the urgent work and selects the work from the most senior staff members and/or the most interesting or difficult assignments (in terms of layout). She puts a great deal of time and effort into these assignments, and always produces an excellent finished product, which the staff member is very pleased with, and seldom needs to send back for correcting. However, this practice is putting the other word-processor, Jayne, under considerable pressure, as she has to complete all the urgent work and receives all the complaints when work is not ready on time. This is causing her to make more mistakes, thus creating more delays. She does prefer the more straightforward assignments, and is quicker and more accurate at speed than Amanda; however, she resents the fact that Amanda is giving the impression among the senior staff that she is the 'golden girl'.

Instructions

1 Identify the signs and possible causes of conflict that relate to this situation. Consider how the conflict might develop and what might trigger it. Pay attention to individual factors and workplace factors that might contribute.

2 Propose some strategies to deal with this conflict situation: (a) before it comes to a head, and (b) if it does erupt into an argument.

3 In threes, role play the situation *before* any actual conflict arises. Two students play the characters described and the third plays the supervisor, who has to negotiate a solution that is accepted by both other parties.

4 After the role play, students give feedback to the 'supervisor' on his/her negotiation/conflict management skills.

5 Repeat the role play and feedback, swapping roles. This time, role play the situation *once it has developed into a conflict*.

6 As a class, discuss the role plays.

C Negotiating/dealing with conflict
Student exercises

Exercise C2 Intervene in client/staff member conflict situation

Exercise

A junior staff member is dealing with a client on the phone. The client has received a letter, demanding payment of a bill, and threatening court action if the bill is not paid within seven days. The client claims to have sent payment by cheque over two weeks previously. The staff member cannot find any record of payment on the client's record on the computer.

Instructions

1 Write down the signs and possible causes of conflict in this situation. Consider the situation from the point of view of the client and the staff member separately. What is each person concerned about? What does each person want to achieve?

2 The client demands to speak to the manager (you). Write a plan of how you will deal with this situation. Anticipate likely responses from the customer and include follow-up action as far as finally sorting out the situation **and** maintaining a good relationship with the client.

3 In pairs, role play the interaction between the client and the supervisor from the point where the supervisor takes the phone from the junior staff member.

4 After the role play, discuss in your pairs the success of the interaction. Was the situation resolved to the satisfaction of both parties? What improvements could you suggest?

5 Reversing roles, repeat the role play, trying out some of the ideas suggested in step 4.

6 As a class, discuss the exercise.

C Negotiating/dealing with conflict
Student exercises

Exercise C3 Negotiate with other supervisor over resource allocation

Exercise

You work for a suburban branch of a chain of car sales yards. Because of the recession, sales are down, and it has been decided to merge your branch with another one fairly nearby—closing down one site and moving all personnel and cars to the other site. You, as office manager, and the office manager of the other branch, have been asked to negotiate the details of the merger. You have been instructed to cut staff numbers by 15% by a reallocation of jobs to improve efficiency in the new combined office and by cutting down on the number of sales consultants. All staff will be moved to Branch 1, which has the best office facilities and sales location. Senior management will decide ultimately which out of the two branch managers will be the manager of the new branch—unless one of you decides to take a redundancy package.

The staffing and resource details for each branch (before the merger) are given below:

Branch 1		***Branch 2***	
Staff:	*Office manager/book-keeper/accountant (student 1)* *Clerical staff x 3* *Car sales staff x 9* *Receptionist*	*Staff:*	*Office manager (student 2)* *Book-keeper/accountant* *Clerical staff x 6* *Desk-top publishing expert* *Car sales staff x 12* *Receptionist*
Resources:	*training room/meeting room* *technical library*	*Resources:*	*computer data-base system* *magazine produced 'in-house' and sent to all customers*

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Instructions

1 In pairs, role play the negotiation between the two office managers. Each of you wants to maximise the use of resources for the company (otherwise this combined branch will be scrapped altogether) and protect the jobs of as many of your own staff as possible (especially yourself).

2 Afterwards, write down the outcomes according to the agreements reached. In pairs, referring to your written summaries, evaluate the success of your negotiation from each manager's point of view.

3 In class, discuss the exercise.

D Presenting information
Student exercises

Exercise D1 Present information to a group of staff

Exercise

You have been asked by your manager to give the staff a brief talk on Occupational Health and Safety—in particular, the employees' responsibilities under the Act and the responsibilities of management. You will make this the first of a series in which you also highlight a particular aspect of OH&S and give general guidelines about it e.g. use of fire extinguishers; fire evacuation procedures; manual handling; first aid; ergonomic chairs; noise; VDU dangers; etc.

Instructions

1 Prepare a fifteen minute presentation to staff, covering the main points of the Occupational Health and Safety Act that applies in your state, and selecting a specific issue to discuss in more detail (but still covering only the main points—you are not meant to be an expert in all areas of OH&S). Choose a topic of particular relevance in your workplace and/or personal interest.

   This task will require reading the Act and researching the topic you have chosen, as well as planning the delivery of your presentation.

2 Give your presentation to the class or a small group—as if the other students were employees within your section.

3 After the presentation, ask students to provide you with feedback on your presentation skills. You may wish to prepare a written feedback questionnaire and ask students to fill this in, as well as providing oral feedback.

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D Presenting information
Student exercises

Exercise D2 Present proposal to management

Exercise

You are personally convinced of the benefits of employee health promotion in improving productivity and morale, reducing sick leave etc. You have arranged a meeting with your senior manager, the human resource manager and the finance manager of your company, to present a proposal to them for an employee health promotion strategy—either for the whole company, or for your division only (as a 'pilot' program, to see how successful it is).

Instructions

1 Research the topic of health promotion, so that you will have plenty of facts to support your argument when presenting to management. Include the evidence that such programs can work, the details of the strategy you propose and how much (approximately) it will cost.

2 Prepare a ten minute presentation to management. This will have to be high impact in order to convince them within a short space of time.

3 In groups of four, role play the presentation.

4 After the presentation, the other students in the group give feedback to the presenter on his/her presentation skills and how convincing the argument was.

5 In class, discuss the exercise.

E Work planning
Student exercises

Exercise E1 Develop a time management system

Exercise

You are office manager for a medium sized company, in charge of all administration staff (about fifteen) plus all administrative arrangements (including the computer system) for the consultants (about twenty). You consider it very important to be accessible to your staff and the consultants, and therefore you have had an 'open door at all times' policy. You have had a system where your diary sits outside your office and staff can book appointments in it for any time that is not already taken.

However, you have found, as your workload has increased, that your system is not working. In particular, you are expected to write budgets, prepare proposals and reports and keep up-to-date with relevant information, yet you can never settle down to work on these tasks for a substantial period of time—unless you come in at the weekend. Recently, this has been happening more and more, causing you to get progressively more wound up and causing your family to complain about being neglected. Even though you know that the budgets come up every month at the same time, yet they always seem to 'sneak up on you', so that you work late every night for the preceding week, and come in on Saturday.

When you are working or talking to someone, you are constantly interrupted by phonecalls—usually on trivial matters that could wait—and you never have your diary in front of you to make appointments if you need to.

Your desk is so cluttered that you become easily distracted while working by another task within your field of vision.

Finally, your in-tray is so cluttered with routine memos, advertising leaflets etc. that you often miss urgent memos that get buried within half an hour of arriving.

Instructions

1 Design a work management system for yourself that will resolve these issues as far as possible, while still maintaining accessibility to staff and consultants when they really need you.

2 Present the main features of your system to a small group (or in pairs) for comment.

3 Modify the system, if you consider it appropriate, in accordance with feedback received.

4 In class, discuss the exercise.

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E Work planning
Student exercises

Exercise E Allocate work to staff (team)

Exercise

There are five people in your section, whose work organisation you are responsible for. Their roster for the week has to meet the following restrictions:

- *each person has approximately equal time on* ***reception***
- *each person has approximately equal time on* ***customer phone queries***
- *each person has approximately equal time on* ***word processing***
- *each person has to take the mail once*
- *reception has to be staffed from 8.45 am-5 pm every day*
- *the mail goes at 3.30 pm*
- *wherever possible, there must be two people taking phone queries from 9 am to 5.30 pm every day (can be just one for short times e.g. lunchtime or end of the day)*
- *any person not required for phone or reception duties does word processing*
- *one person leaves at 4.30 pm on Monday and Thursday for study (paid time—does not have to make the time up)*
- *one person arrives at 9.30 am every day, because of school children*
- *another person has Friday off*
- *everyone has half an hour for lunch*
- *everyone works 37½ hours per week (including paid study leave)*

Instructions

1 Organise a week's roster, taking all the above restrictions into account. Hint: start by taking a blank weekly timetable and marking in columns for every duty that has to be fulfilled. Work in half day segments.

2 Write out the roster in a suitable form for pinning up on the staff noticeboard.

F Discussion of relevant issues in small groups Student exercises

Exercise F1 Discuss issues relevant to people in the workplace

Exercise

The following are some issues that are relevant to office supervisors in the contemporary Australian workplace and society: absenteeism; affirmative action; managerial ethics; stress; computers in the workplace.

Instructions

1 In small groups, select a topic for discussion (which will be in a later session). Choose from the topics given above, or select an alternative issue. You may like to develop a specific question to debate e.g.:
- How can employee absenteeism be reduced?
- How effective is affirmative action in the workplace?
- What pressures act on employees or managers to act unethically?
- Should stress be a compensable work-related injury?
- Have computers had a positive or a negative impact on the office overall?

2 Research the topic in preparation for discussion. Be prepared to contribute a viewpoint, supported by evidence.

3 In groups (of 4-6) discuss the topic you have chosen.

4 Afterwards, individually, summarise briefly on paper the main points made in answer to the question and state (giving reasons) your own conclusion.

5 Reform the group (briefly) to check that all summaries are consistent and elect one spokesperson to report the results of your discussion to the rest of the class.

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Self-assessment/peer assessment form

Exercise: .....

Name: .....

What did I do well?

1 .....

2 .....

3 .....

4 .....

What do I need to improve on?

1 .....

2 .....

3 .....

4 .....

Performance standard: .....
(credit; competency attained; not yet attained)

Assessor's name: .....
(self; partner; 'group X')